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BULGARIA

SUCCESS STORY

Village Clinic Gets a New Roof and a More Proactive Approach

Peace Corps Volunteer Works with Community to Improve Access to Health Care



Photo: Peace Corps

Students in the village of Gita find out that learning about their health can be fun.

The key I have found is to listen to the community members and to help turn their ideas and suggestions into reality.

--Trevor Lake, Peace Corps Volunteer in Bulgaria

Peace Corps Volunteer Trevor Lake shares his experience supporting a community project to improve health care for rural citizens.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, it is my responsibility to assist my community with grass roots development work. The Mayor of Chirpan, Vassil Donev, proposed to me the Gita Medical Center Restoration Project. He identified the need for better health care in the village of Gita, and was worried about the condition of the roof of the Gita Medical Center, which serves the 976 residents of the villages of Gita, Oslarka and Durshava.

I worked with my Bulgarian colleagues to develop a strategy for improved healthcare and structural stability of the clinic and we applied to the USAID SPA (Small Project Assistance) program.

Our project team came to the conclusion that the quality of health care in many Bulgarian villages is hindered by a lack of health education. Our idea was to spread basic knowledge to all residents of these villages by creating bi-monthly health classes for the children and adults of the community. We began to work closely with Dr. Koleva, the director of the Gita Medical Center. She became very enthusiastic about our idea and pledged to teach classes to both students and adults about various health issues, including human sexuality and the dangers of drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Dr. Koleva also began to provide each of her patients with additional information about their health. For example, after a checkup, she gave an expectant mother information pamphlets and a private information session about prenatal health.

The other issue to address was the overall physical condition of the Gita Medical Center. Fixing the medical center's roof was vital to maintain its function as a safe and effective health clinic for the surrounding village residents. Most of these people do not have access to basic transportation and are unable to travel nine kilometers to the nearest hospital.

When the project team found out that the project would be fully funded, the wheels began to turn. The project implementation went off without a hitch. The roof was repaired by professionals and is now structurally sound and ready for many harsh Bulgarian winters to come. The Gita Medical Center was stocked with health information brochures, including information about everything from sexually transmitted diseases to basic first aid. The bi-monthly health information classes were a great success. The students were attentive and the teachers enthusiastic.

As a Peace Corps volunteer, I will always be encouraged when I think about how a struggling village community managed to improve their quality of life by joint efforts from local educators, community officials, the municipality, Peace Corps, and USAID.